

WHAT IS A TOWN OR PARISH COUNCIL?

Parish and Town Councils are the same; they have the same powers and act within the same legislation. A Town Council is a Parish Council that has usually decided to have a mayor and call itself a Town Council.

Parish and Town councils are the tier of local government **closest to the people**.

Parish Councils represent the concerns and aspirations of a genuine local community. They are not a voluntary organisation, not a charity nor (a common mistake) anything to do with the Church.

Despite being strictly audited each year, Parish Councils are the most non bureaucratic and the cheapest kind of local authority in existence.

What can they do?

As Parish Councils were created in law, they **can only act within the law** by exercising their powers and functions which have been conferred on them by Statutes (i.e. Acts of Parliament). Anything a Parish Council tries to do outside these powers is *ultra vires*, in other words, outside the law.

The range of powers available to Parish Councils continues to change. **The Localism Act** was introduced in November 2011 and its aim was to devolve more decision making powers from central government back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils.

The basic responsibility of Parish Councils is to make the lives of their local communities more comfortable **by representing the whole electorate within the parish, delivering or co-ordinating services to meet local needs and striving to improve quality of life in the parish**. Parish Councils can also comment on planning applications and be represented at public enquiries.

Parish Councils do not receive Council Tax directly from the public, but are primarily funded at present from a **small percentage of the Council Tax charge** made by District/Unitary authorities to local householders.

Parish Councils have a duty to appoint or **employ a Clerk** to record and carry out the council's decisions. All councils must **meet at least four times a year** (although most meet more often) and their **meetings must be open to the public**, although for certain restricted items of confidentiality they may occasionally exclude the public.

A Parish Council *is* the collective voice of its community.